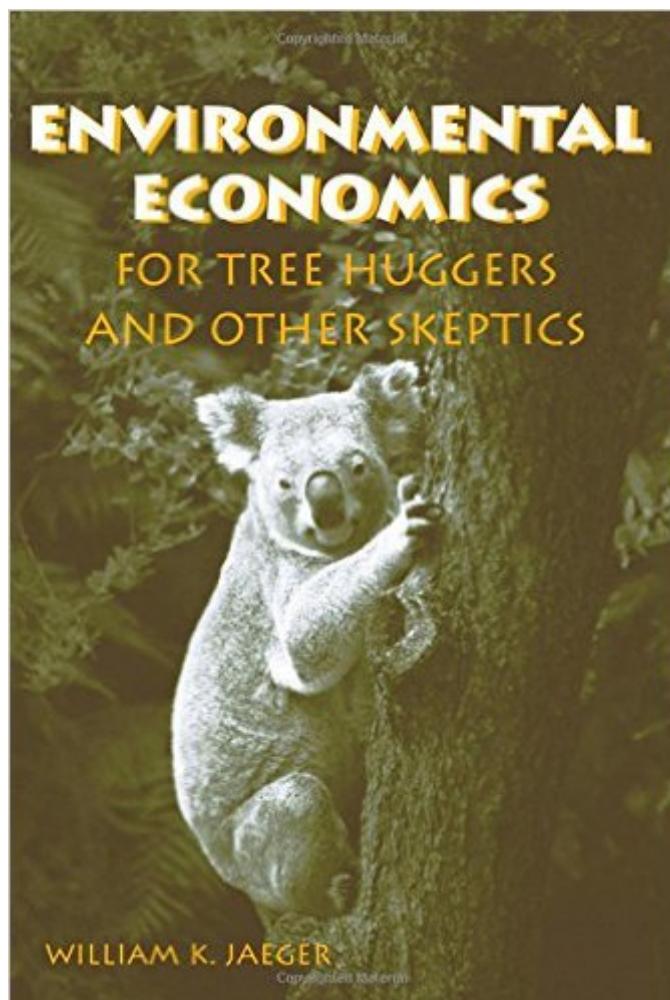


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Environmental Economics For Tree Huggers And Other Skeptics



Synopsis

Though many students and environmentalists shudder at even the thought of economics, a working knowledge of the basics can be a powerful ally. Economic arguments carry a great deal of weight, and putting them to work for environmental causes can be a deciding factor, especially in policy debates. The reverse is true as well, and an understanding of the possibly flawed, misleading, or overstated economics behind an opponent's case can be crucially important. Environmental Economics for Tree Huggers and Other Skeptics carefully explains the tools of economic analysis and shows how they can be used to help reveal the root causes of and potential solutions for environmental and natural resource problems. Jaeger's proven techniques and wonderfully conversational tone assume no economics training, and his presentation of the material is designed to facilitate clarity. His step-by-step approach unearths surprisingly simple, easy-to-remember principles and shows how to apply them to real-world environmental problems. Those with exposure to introductory microeconomics will find Environmental Economics for Tree Huggers and Other Skeptics to be a welcome refresher. Undergraduate and graduate students of environmental studies, resource management, law, policy, and related fields, as well as novices who are skeptical of how the field could possibly help them in their own efforts, will be pleasantly surprised.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A better title for this book would be "Environmental Economics for Skeptics about Tree-Huggers". Its viewpoint hews very faithfully to the Econ 101 textbook version of neoclassical microeconomics.

The author (WKJ) occasionally mentions other points of view in order to seem fair, but these are reassuringly dismissed. For example, consider WKJ's discussion of the so-called "environmental Kuznets curve". The EKC is an alleged empirical relationship between economic development and declines in pollution; its biggest fans are neoliberal economists who claim that the solution to environmental problems is more, not less, economic activity. WKJ does mention that "the dust has definitely not settled on this debate [sc., about the reality of the EKC]," but goes on to say "[but] some important ideas have emerged" (@100). With that phrase, WKJ flips the discussion to make the EKC appear much less controversial than it actually is. The problem with the EKC is as time goes by, empirical evidence seems very much against it, especially for non-localized issues like global warming. No worries: WKJ tells us that "the absence of evidence of an EKC for some environmental indicators should not be construed as proof that the EKC notion is invalid." He spends the next 3-1/2 pages discussing why the EKC is "good news" (@104). For more nuanced evaluations of the EKC even within the framework of conventional econometrics (i.e., NOT by tree-huggers), see, e.g., D. Stern's 2004 paper, "The Rise and Fall of the Environmental Kuznets Curve" and the 2006 paper by Galeotti & al., "On the Robustness of Robustness Checks of the Environmental Kuznets Curve," both of which you can find for free online.

I read William Jaeger's *Environmental Economics for Tree Huggers* not long after it came out and felt that this was a text clearly needed in the field and that it had been done with clarity and care. I couldn't imagine anyone not wanting to buy this book if they were interested in how economists make decisions regarding our environment and the important resources that contribute to our well-being like air, water, and forests. I was surprised to find a fairly long review attacking the book. I reread the book after reading the review and found that the first third of the book was a wonderful introduction to microeconomics, one of the complaints of the review. Another was that it wasn't sufficiently nuanced, but as I moved past the first half of the book, I found that Dr. Jaeger wasn't avoiding difficult issues, as suggested by the reviewer, but had spent a substantial portion of the book trying to better understand them. Once again, seven years later, I found this book to be exactly what it proposes to be, a way for someone with little or no experience in economics to understand how we can value something, that at first glance, seems to be impossible to value, like the air we breathe. I was surprised to find the negative, but well-written review mention Gerard Debreu, an economist whose work I am familiar with from the time I was a mathematically inclined economics graduate student. I doubt that anyone reading Jaeger's book will be particularly interested in the existence of the minima and maxima of intersecting hyperplanes, which is what Debreu is known

for. The review I have read for this book is unfortunately irrelevant. This book does help you learn the basic economics that economists use when trying to advise governments, and that is not a bad thing, in spite of what the reviewer may think.

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